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## TIKKUN OLAM: Our Soul-Searching Repair of the World

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From the beginning of our life together (decades ago) we wanted to serve God in order to repair the world.<sup>1</sup> But our longing to do that often seemed to be at odds with the need to repair *ourselves*. When we were busy with the one, we ignored the other, and vice versa. Things went on that way for some time until we learned certain lessons, the first of which was that the *masorah* (מסורה—Jewish religious tradition)<sup>2</sup> offers more than one way to understand *tikkun olam* (תיקון עולם).

The *tikkun* part seemed straightforward enough. We understood it to mean "... putting things in their right relationship, in right order [vis-à-vis Torah],"<sup>3</sup> or as the Kabbalists put it, "completing" the world.<sup>4</sup>

The word *olam*, however, raised a lot of questions. For example, *which* "world" were we going to repair? The Mishnah teaches that "whoever saves a single soul from the children of humankind, Scripture credits him [or her] as if he [or she] had saved a whole world."<sup>5</sup> So, potentially, it seemed, there were as many worlds to repair as there were lives to save.

Then, as we learned from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *olam*, at least in the Torah, does not mean "world."<sup>6</sup> It only came to have that meaning later, in the language of the rabbis. The Hebrew *shoresh* (root) of *olam*, *ayin-lamed-mem* (א-ל-מ), refers instead to that which is hidden or withdrawn.<sup>7</sup> *Eil Olam* (אל עולם), one of many names of God, is "... the One Who sows the future with invisible seeds in the present."<sup>8</sup> *Eil Olam* is

... the Ruler and Director of the hidden future which is slowly maturing to perfection in the course of time. For every second truly lived is in the very centre of that eternity in which we all not only will participate but in which we are participating if we are what we should be.<sup>9</sup>

And if we are, then: "... goodness itself becomes a tree of happiness and salvation for the farthest thousandth generation."<sup>10</sup>

But what if we're not? Many of us find it hard to believe that a future a thousand generations away could depend on what we do today. We don't see ourselves planting seeds in the present for a future we'll never know.

### *Olam As Divine Providence*

Nor do we see that, even for ourselves, the future is determined, as Rabbi Michael Hattin (DOB unk.) puts it, by which model of human history we choose to adopt.

Will it be the mechanistic approach that denies a Higher Purpose and sees all of life's events as either self-authored triumphs and defeats, or else accidents of nature? Or will it be the providential model that recognizes an all-powerful Deity Who created the cosmos with a purpose, Who quietly demands but also lovingly guides humanity and all humans to fulfill their unique roles in the larger world as well as within the microcosm of their own individual lives?<sup>11</sup>

We ourselves gravitated toward the providential model, but like many before us we had our doubts. We were reluctant to accept an all-powerful deity, owing to our unreasoned demand for material proof of an incorporeal God (about which, more momentarily).

And yet, even if we covered our eyes and closed our minds, we could not help but see that the Creation is unfolding in accord with the Creator's natural and moral-spiritual laws. The evidence of providence lay plainly before us: If we know the Creation (הבריאה—*ha-Beriah*) to be predictable, should we not also assume it to be purposive? And if that's true, should we not, then, strive to understand the Creator's message for us inherent in the Creation? Is not the Creation itself a demonstration of God's manifest power and unfettered will?<sup>12</sup>

But even if we could agree that God is indeed all-powerful, what would it mean for us to say we didn't see ourselves as subject to that power? What kind of relationship could we expect to have with an omnipotent and omniscient<sup>13</sup> God, other than one of dependence?

Still, for many, the word "dependent" has become tainted. In the land of rugged individualism, where self-determination and self-governance are the ruling ethos, liberty for some, unfortunately, has come to mean liberty *from* the rules. And we Jewish Americans, sadly, have fallen under the influence of these ideas. For those of us who have, standing on our own two feet and going

our own way is how we like things, and dependance is something to avoid like the plague.

On the other hand, our personal experience of “doing our own thing” has taught us that, however much planning we did, and whatever benefits we thought we had coming to us as a result of acting without moral limits—whether spurred on by moral ignorance, casual indifference, or intentional wrongdoing—the ultimate and actual consequences of that behavior played out unexpectedly and painfully. The onus of our wrongdoing landed on us and others whom we cared about.<sup>14</sup>

While we get to make free-willed moral choices for ourselves, it is God Who arranges the educative consequences, which then become the context of our future decisions. We began to see there were things that we must leave to God.

We also discovered that when we chose to live as if we were morally autonomous (which, at the time, we were convinced would make us free), we were actually condemning ourselves to a life dominated by experiences of materialism and sensuality, which often rapidly, but always ultimately, degenerated into boredom, dissatisfaction, and trouble—a life *without moral freedom*.<sup>15</sup>

It was only much later that we came to see moral freedom—the ability and will to choose between good and evil—as the basis for all others freedoms, political, economic, and social. It is a painful lesson Americans are learning nowadays.

Paradoxically, these experiences brought us closer to a better life. For a life of Torah and *mitzvot* (מצוות—commandments) began to look more reasonable. A life of moral freedom, which was also a life of meaning and satisfaction, beckoned. Even a life of unlimited goodness seemed ponderable.

### God's Goodness

But we realized that if we wanted the possibility of goodness without limits, then we would have to accept that God has unconditional, unlimited free will. For how can there be unlimited goodness if God is limited?

As Rabbi Hirsch teaches, “... the consciousness of the free, completely unhindered Almighty of God [is] a consciousness which ... forms the preliminary condition for all ... [our] consciousness of morality...”<sup>16</sup>

What happens if we can't accept that? Without unconditional free will, as Rabbi Hirsch says, “God ... could not save the world from either physical or moral evil.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, we could as little be master of our bodies as God of the material of the world; for God is the author of our *bekhirah khofshit* (בְּחִירָה חֹפְשִׁית—[moral<sup>18</sup>] free will). “Freedom would be absent from the world. Blind pitiless necessity would rule the world together with its God and its people.”<sup>19</sup> There would certainly be no *tikkun olam*.

What's more, if we want to rely on the possibility of unlimited goodness, then, of necessity, we would also have to acknowledge that God is incorporeal (אֵל

רוּחָנִי)<sup>20</sup>—that God does *not* have a physical body,<sup>21</sup> that the Creator is outside (בְּחוּץ—*bakhutz*) of our material world.<sup>22</sup> For nothing material is without its limits. If God is material, then God would necessarily be limited by the material. The problem is, none of us with bodies have personal experience of incorporeal existence, which makes it difficult for us to accept.<sup>23</sup> But some indirect support for the idea of God's incorporeality came to us from an unlikely source.

### Science Unwittingly Affirms Incorporeality

It's ironic that the above tenets of Jewish belief, once-basic but now rejected as nonsensical by much of contemporary Jewry,<sup>24</sup> have been reinforced (inadvertently) by cosmologists and physicists. This has happened even though at one time, mainstream scientists seemed to have little interest in the ultimate cause of materiality. In the not-too-distant past, they claimed that there was no “reason” for the laws of physics—they just existed! They characterized the cause of materiality as unprovable and thus irrelevant, although apparently that's no longer their point of view.

We shouldn't be surprised to be talking about science here, although some may ask, what's science got to do with it? For, as Rabbi Hirsch teaches, all existence and action in the whole universe is nothing but a “thought of God”<sup>25</sup> and a message from God, the Creator. All human knowledge and science are, in effect, only the effort to get at the nature and meaning of life from looking into the workings of the “mind” of God. Thus, we only think we know something when we half succeed in getting some hint of the Divine Thought.

The naturalist who denies God discloses a trace of the very God he denies with every law, with every force, with every purpose he works out of any form or shape he investigates. Yea he denies his denial with the very step which he takes in his searching in the realm of nature. The end he seeks presupposes the thinking God Whom he denies, Who must have established the laws and brought about the results, to discover the nature of which is his desire, and some inkling of which leads him, and the discovery of which fills him with supreme joy.<sup>26</sup>

But that denial seems to be weakening. Less than two decades ago, Paul Davies, professor of physics and Director of BEYOND: Center for Fundamental Concepts in Science at Arizona State University, asked, “Can the mighty edifice of physical order we perceive in the world about us ultimately be rooted in reasonless absurdity? If so, then nature is a fiendishly clever bit of trickery: meaninglessness and absurdity somehow masquerading as ingenious order and rationality.”<sup>27</sup>

More recently, Richard Feynman, a California Institute of Technology physicist, acknowledged that although his colleagues can make accurate predictions based on quantum mechanics, they do not understand

the *why* and *how* of quantum mechanics, even though it is "... the most fundamental theory we have" about the physical world.<sup>28</sup>

It is reasonable to believe in an incorporeal cause of the material Creation, according to Martin Rees, a British cosmologist and astrophysicist:<sup>29</sup>

The main idea ... is that the universe is amazingly finetuned, and that if certain basic features were mathematically just a little bit different, we wouldn't be here, and neither would much else in the present universe. The force that holds the atomic nucleus together ... is one example, since if it were just a bit larger or just a bit smaller, there would be no stars. Or, if the force of gravity were only slightly different, the universe would never have come into existence.

One of the take-aways is that the scale of the universe is not a testament to the insignificance of humankind.

Why could we [humankind] exist only in a very big universe? If the universe weren't something on the order of 10 billion light years across, life on Earth would be impossible. This is because it took some 4.5 billion years for human life to develop here on Earth from the original single cell organisms, and it took just as long for the earliest stars to have produced the materials that make up our life.

In effect, the size of the universe is essential to the development of human life on earth.

Our take-away from all this is that the likelihood of all this being the outcome of chance is non-existent. There is no believable way of explaining the Creation without an intelligent creator, at least not in the absence of evidence for that explanation.

Rees admits that, if one does not acknowledge the "providence" [i.e., an incorporeal creator] perspective to explain the existence of the Creation, the alternative is the "multiverse" explanation, which he admits is not more than a "tentative hypothesis," one complicated by the "extreme physics" after the Big Bang,<sup>30</sup> which itself is now confounded by the James Webb Space Telescope's revelations.<sup>31</sup> As astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson has recognized, "The universe may be weirder than we can ever imagine."<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps, in an effort to cope with what they do not understand, some scientists have theorized that materiality simply evolved. But, of course, that does not tell us from *what* it evolved and *how*. We should also note, the scientific method usually requires identifying the prior *material* cause of any kind of materiality or, if that's not possible, that it be acknowledged as beyond the reach of the methodology of science.

Others have proposed mathematical models (some very elegant) to prove their assertion that the world has always existed. Regarding the view that it's equally likely the world always existed as that it was created

out of nothing,<sup>33</sup> which are the only two explanations because all others are derivative: One of the apparent axioms of creation is that from the smallest to the largest cosmic *systems*, all such systems, which are defined by persistent identifiable elements and predicable actions, have external creators and "law-givers"—that is, they are not self-authored and self-directed. In other words, atoms, molecules, planets, solar systems, and galaxies do not have intelligence of their own. So the idea that the universe always existed is contradicted by the principle that, as a predictable system, it had an external creator and, ipso facto, did not *always* exist.

Still others have claimed it was created out of nothing,<sup>34</sup> although the philosopher Jim Holt has in effect characterized that idea as derivative, coming from an unscientific, "pseudo-religious point of view."<sup>35</sup> The so-called nothing that physicists and cosmologists define originates from beyond the scientifically verifiable material world, and therefore it is from "nothing" only insofar as its provenance eludes the scientific method.

We apply the principle that "What is unfalsifiable is unscientific, and it is pseudo-science to declare an unfalsifiable theory to be true."<sup>36</sup> And we distinguish between speculative theories and evidence-based laws, because it's possible for theoretical explanations to be mathematically perfect, appearing lawful, but in fact be unable to account empirically for the phenomena they purport to explain.<sup>37</sup>

Some have resorted to theories of cosmology that seem to ignore completely the demands of empiricism. Offering virtually no testable hypotheses, these theories may fairly be described as imaginative science fiction.

The multiverse theory, for example, proposes the existence of multidimensional worlds beyond our material universe, presumably to demystify the source of materiality. Others note, "... the additional universes of the multiverse would lie beyond our powers of observation and could never be directly investigated." They cannot be verified empirically because "... you can't get any evidence about what existed before space and time came into being."<sup>38</sup> The disputes among physicists have been reported as "A Crisis at the Edge of Physics."<sup>39</sup>

But even if scientists in the future were able to verify empirically the existence of a "world of numerous other dimensions," and to discover therein a creative force, they still would not have verified the *source* of materiality or, as we know it, *ha-Beriah*; because, as noted by award-winning science journalist John Horgan, "The belief that all of reality can be fully comprehended in terms of physics and the equations of physics is a fantasy."<sup>40</sup> Insofar as any world exists by virtue of physicality, it will beg the question: what is the character of its incorporeal source—which science is methodologically precluded from answering.

The belief in the limitless powers of science may have its roots in the commitment of science to "Naturalism," the ideology that only those things which can be verified by the methods of the natural sciences, espe-

cially physics, can be said to actually exist.<sup>41</sup> Since the scientific method cannot directly account for anything that does not take verifiable material form, science must necessarily refuse to acknowledge any meaningful connection between the material and non-material (spiritual) domains.<sup>42</sup>

It is possible, however, that science itself has begun to chip away at the seeming inextricability of Naturalism in science. For the budding science of neurobiology has recently confirmed the human ability to bring that which is spiritual into material form.

Groundbreaking neurobiological research of recent decades has shown that the human mind, a non-material instrumentality, which is not the same as the physical brain but nevertheless is verifiable by persuasive evidence, has the power to conceive a purpose which it can induce into effect in the material world; and that the mind can transform spiritual experience in the material world into scientifically verifiable, new physical brain structure.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps it is not implausible and unreasonable to believe, after all, that an incorporeal, free-willed, purposive Creator established the material and spiritual domains and their laws<sup>44</sup> (unless we want to claim that humankind seemingly is revealing powers that the Creator does not have).

### **God First Looked Into the Torah**

Nor should we be surprised, that we cannot know, scientifically, *how* God brings about such creations, even when the evidence of those creations is staring us in the face. Midrash Rabbah (1:1) calls on us to trust that, in ways we cannot know,<sup>45</sup> “the Holy One, blessed is God, looked into the Torah and created the world accordingly” (היה הקב”ה מביט בתורה ובורא את העולם). After all, as hard as we may have tried, none of us has ever managed to fathom the neural processes of the mind (in contrast to the brain) of a human being, let alone the mind of God.

However, the fact that we cannot comprehend *how* God created, does not prevent us from knowing *that* God created, for we live with the evidence of it daily. We rely every day upon a Creation that conforms to God’s law. Further, we are enjoined to learn what we can with what we are given, to understand what *is* accessible to our understanding. If not, what are the words of the Midrash doing here? And the answer would be: Nothing if we do not learn from them.

So what does it mean to trust that, in ways that we cannot comprehend, God looked into the Torah and created the world accordingly? And what has it got to do with us?

Perhaps what it requires of us, first, is that we acknowledge that God’s ways are not our ways. For example, when we look at the assertion of the Midrash, it may be tempting to think that what we’re meant to focus on are the *results* of God’s creating; that materiality—the world and everything in it—represents the be-

ginning of everything. It’s also possible that this way of looking at things makes sense to us precisely because we are (in part) physical ourselves and we live in a material world. It might also explain why we are satisfied to understand the first word of the Torah, *bereshit* (בראשית), to mean “in the beginning,” as if it were a sort of timeline, indicating what came first: in the beginning, God created this, and then that, and then the other.

But Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yitzhak, 1040-1105) famously takes exception to that idea. As he explains, “The verse does not come to teach the order of Creation by saying that [the heavens and the earth] came first, for if this is what it came to teach us, it should have written ‘At first, He Created the Heavens, etc.,’ for you have no instance of the word ראשית in Scripture that is not attached to the word that follows it.... You must say that the verse did not teach in the chronological order of what came earlier—and what came later—at all.”<sup>46</sup>

However, if that’s the case, then what is the word בראשית doing here at the beginning of the Torah? As Rabbi Hirsch answers:

... if the Torah is above all the first building stone for the purpose which God had in creating the world, and out of which that purpose is to be achieved, and therefore is called ראשית, then [this end] ..., even if only developed later, must have been ensured right at the beginning of the world, just because the world was created בראשית, came into existence *completely* out of God’s hand, so that from its very inception it was formed for these high purposes.”<sup>47</sup>

Or as Rashi puts it: “... as our rabbis have interpreted it: ‘God created the world for the sake of the Torah’ since it is called (in Proverbs 8.22), ‘the beginning (ראשית) of His way....’”<sup>48</sup>

In other words, ראשית is something that is built into the Creation from the very beginning, but which only later comes to fruition. Thus, the world was created according to the Torah, but the Torah, which is referred to by the word “*reishit*” was only revealed to Israel much later.

It’s helpful to think of *reishit* as a sort of blueprint for the world springing from the mind of God, as a blueprint springs from the mind of an architect. But it is not that precisely, because for an architect the building may be an end in itself, and the purpose for the building may be only tangential to that. Counter-intuitively perhaps, what is most critical here, is what comes before, as is indicated by the meaning of the word itself.

What *reishit* really means here is the thing for the sake of which the world was created—the *purpose for which the world was created*. As in the Rashi, “God created the world for the sake of the Torah” (Bereishit 1:1) *and not the other way around*. The first words of the Torah are there not to announce that the world was created first, but to announce the *purpose* for which the world was created, which is not to say, of course, that

the world is unimportant, for it represents the platform on which the mission of the Torah may be enacted. But the Torah is the reason why. The Torah is the pre-existing purpose and the intended long-term result. As Rabbi Hirsch tells us: "... in this we see the cornerstone of our awareness of God and the world..."<sup>49</sup>

So what do we learn from these few words of the Midrash? What does it mean to trust that God looked into the Torah? And what is expected of us, we who are hoping to perfect the world?

It means that while God's ways are not our ways, we yet may learn from them. It also means that God's starting place is not the world but the Torah, and yet the best of all actual worlds is the result: "The בְּרֵאשִׁית of the world created by God is not the best possible, but the actual best"; because, "With all its seeming evils, it corresponds to the plans of the Wisdom of its Creator Who could have created it otherwise."<sup>50</sup> Finally, it means that if God looked into the Torah and created the world according to the Torah, shouldn't we, who are made in the image of God, do the same? Shouldn't we also look into the Torah in order to create a more perfect world?

Withal, the most promising life of *tikkun olam* is the one which begins with Torah and *mitzvot*.<sup>51</sup> For the *mitzvot* represent the moral-spiritual infrastructure<sup>52</sup> of *ha-Beriah*, and they reflect the Creator's expressed purposes to create, sustain, and restore life,<sup>53</sup> which necessarily define our mission,<sup>54</sup> because the essence of *tikkun olam* is to "walk in God's ways"<sup>55</sup> and "choose life,"<sup>56</sup> invigorating it whenever and however we can.<sup>57</sup> When we unconditionally accept that mission, we become one of the *kovei Hashem* [קוֹי ה'—“streaming with all one's being towards God”<sup>58</sup>], who “sprout wings like eagles” (Kiddushin 82b) and fly above the limitations of earthly existence.

### ***Decline of Torah's Influence***

But where the consciousness of that mission has disappeared, and the adherence to Torah-derived morals and ethics has all but vanished, secular culture has not proved to be a viable substitute. The legacy of amoral culture has damned us with an epidemic of narcissism, health-devastating hedonism, widespread marketing of pornography,<sup>59</sup> pervasive and intrusive dehumanizing technology, irremediable environmental plundering, unapologetic government and corporate criminality, rapacious capitalism, and democracy-annihilating, oligarchic, fascist, libertarian Christian nationalism, to mention only a few.

Moreover, science, treated by many since the beginning of the twentieth century as if it were a religion, has not been successful in preserving the best of marriage, family, community, environment, and democracy. Now, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, all of them face existential threats.

If we are to survive such threats, we must move ahead without delay<sup>60</sup> on the path to a predictable and

morally lawful world. We can do that by aligning our *kavanot* (כוּנוֹת—intentions) to Divine Providence (*hashgacha elyonah*—הַשְׁגָּחָה עֲלִיּוֹנָה), God's plan for the unfolding of *ha-Beriah*, and to Special Providence (*hashgacha peratit*—הַשְׁגָּחָה פְּרָטִית), God's plan for the unfolding of our individual lives<sup>61</sup>—which are revealed to us when we study Torah<sup>62</sup> and do *mitzvot*<sup>63</sup> to rectify our own moral-spiritual shortcomings.

### ***Repairing Ourselves***

We were older than most in learning that

... the first product of a [hu]man, the first result of [her or] his work, is [her or] his own character. This would be especially the case in a time [like that of Noah's] ... in which it would certainly require the highest amount of energetic working on oneself to save oneself out of the general depravity....<sup>64</sup>

The objective is to take care of one's mental and spiritual health, what we understand as *tikkun ha-nefesh* (תִּקּוּן הַנֶּפֶשׁ—repairing the soul).<sup>65</sup>

As Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik teaches, we are created as humans *to be creators*, and that our first task is to create ourselves as complete, integrated, moral-spiritual beings.<sup>66</sup>

In recent years, we learned that the ability to refine our character also depends in no small measure on the integration we achieve when we connect the various parts of ourselves, so that they work well together. Daniel J. Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, describes integration as

... the linkage of differentiated elements of a system—[which] leads to the flexible, adaptive, and coherent flow of energy and information in the brain, the mind, and relationships. This coherent flow enables the individual to attain an intentionally established state of mindfulness<sup>67</sup> with practice in the moment and creates the experiential substrate for developing mindful traits in daily life.<sup>68</sup>

We now have compelling evidence that the mind can be functionally distinguished from the brain, much as a driver who determines the direction and speed of a car can be distinguished from the vehicle that is the means of travel but which is not self-operated (at least not yet reliably).<sup>69</sup> This potential of the mind can be understood scientifically. While our awareness—a thought, emotion, or memory—exists in the form of measurable bio-electrical brain-energy, the integration of the mind's elements regulates the flow of that energy and the information it carries.<sup>70</sup> The neural activity is apparent in the symbol-laden meaning of the information that flows between two people. When one says to another, “I love you,” those word-symbols are laden with meaning. On the other hand, the brain neurons that are firing at that moment have no meaning, they are simply electrical energy.

Our mind, by the management of neural energy and information flow, can re-fire and thus re-wire the neurons of the brain, changing the structure of the brain and permanently modifying our conscious and unconscious mental, emotional, and physical initiatives and responses. The mind can even switch chromosomes on and off.<sup>71</sup> The mind thus manages all our ways of knowing, conscious and unconscious, and controls the triggers of our behavior.<sup>72</sup> In this way, the mind manages transitions from mental possibilities to material actualities.

We are thus reminded that the *masorah* has long recognized the body to be merely the instrument and agent of soul-minding. It is the soul which directs the body. The tradition understands various levels of “soul”—*nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshama*. *Nefesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) represents the inner cause of our innate movement—that is, “the will” or starting impulse for a movement, what we come to experience as the intangible personality.<sup>73</sup> *Neshama* (נִשְׁמָה), being unique to human beings, goes beyond *nefesh* to encompass our free-willed striving to align our will to God’s Divine Providence.

From birth and throughout life, our *neshama* relies on our socio-emotional attachment to others, both for our own initial development and for our survival at every level of social life.<sup>74</sup> The empathic potential of the mind, brought to life by healthy attachment to caregivers in infancy and childhood, serves as the seedbed of our thinking about and acting for the greater good, beyond ourselves—our empathic *moral*-spirituality.<sup>75</sup>

However, when socio-emotional attachment has not been well-developed, we may respond to unconscious learning history—based on neglect, physical and verbal abuse—say, as a dissociative reaction to early trauma.<sup>76</sup> That, in turn, may be revealed in psychic and bodily disorders. For example, conflict in our lives can take the form of psychogenically stronger and weaker sides of our bodies, such as when one leg, hand, arm, or eye is stronger than the other.<sup>77</sup> These contrasts can signpost a divided persona, an absence of integration, which we play out in the multiple worlds we inhabit.

We have also learned that it’s possible to discern the two worlds and the two sides of our personas from a psychic “space” between them, conscious of them separately yet experienced as together. Instead of them jerking us back and forth in our day-to-day lives, we may calmly and thoughtfully encounter both worlds and both personas at the same time, all the better to manage them.

We experience that space as our observation, decision, and action central. We understand it Jewishly as our *neshama deiah* (נִשְׁמָה דֵּי־אֵה—soul-mind), which we may employ to express our powers of creative reasoning and moral sensibility. The source of the *neshama*, as Rabbi Hirsch teaches, is the breath of God, *nishmat chayim*, blown into us with the creation of the first human soul. It allows us to partake of the nature of its origin—that is, of God’s free will. It raises us above the

forces of physical necessity. It makes us free, and able to raise ourselves into the realm of freedom.<sup>78</sup>

We can’t account scientifically for the origin of the *neshama deiah*; but from peer-reviewed research studies of interpersonal neurobiology and neuropsychiatry, we have learned how it manages that which we experience as the self.<sup>79</sup>

Our own ability to see more clearly the conflicts between our worlds and personas was helped by the following brief meditations:

With your eyes closed, focus your awareness on a *stronger* part of your body. While doing so, take a few moments to recall a memory of an experience in which you were in some way masterful. It should be something for which you received recognition. It should also be something which made you feel that your life was worthwhile. Allow yourself to dwell on the details of that experience and attempt to think the thoughts and feel the gratifying emotions that you felt then.

Now, once more with your eyes closed, focus your awareness on a *weaker* part of your body. While doing so, take a few moments to recall a memory of an experience in which you were in some way powerless, humbled, or even humiliated, when you wanted nothing but compassion and comfort. Allow yourself to dwell on the details of that experience and attempt to think the thoughts and feel the painful emotions you experienced then.

In these meditations, we occupy an awareness-space in which we can see parts of ourselves that are in psychic opposition. It’s a place from which we can see both sides of our persona. When we’re in that space, we may use our *neshama deiah*—the part of ourselves that makes possible both our awareness and the expression of our morally free-willed souls—to integrate our bodies, minds, emotions and spirits, and free ourselves from the bonds of any neglect, abuse or trauma that we may have suffered.

The nature of integration is not mysterious, but it does require a disciplined effort to achieve. Having done so, we may become more fully unambiguous moral actors in the world. We may become, as the prophet Isaiah puts it, the repairers of the breach, the restorers of the paths to dwell in.<sup>80</sup>

Thankfully, for those of us who lacked a secure attachment in infancy, and for those who experienced neglect or abuse in childhood, thus failing to achieve integration, many methods to bring about neural reprogramming of the brain have been used successfully in the field of neuropsychiatry and other disciplines. Examples include neurofeedback, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), Psychobiological Approach to Sex Addiction Treatment (PASAT), mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and several movement techniques.

It’s also possible as an adult to realize many of the benefits of secure attachment by following the *masorah*’s guidance for *devekut* (דְּבִקוּת—cleaving) to God.



We may bond with God in both the “upper” and “lower” worlds, in both our spiritual and material experience; so that our thoughts, words and deeds take place in God’s reality; and that we come to know, “By the power of what you do below with true love and awe, will you be able to bond with the Creator....”<sup>81</sup> Our experience of *devekut* is that, as with all secure attachment relationships, we wear our heart on our sleeve. Our thoughts, feelings, and spirit become shared and bonded with those of the God of the Torah, Whom we experience personally.<sup>82</sup>

We could thus see the usefulness of integration in pursuing a Torah-based life. The integration of psyche and physicality, for example, could improve self-regulation of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, moods, affect, and behavior, thus positively affecting physical and mental health, and moral awareness. We could see that with the practice of mindfulness we might better focus our attention, achieving a state in which we are neither overwhelmed nor closed off but instead, acutely aware of our surroundings and actions in the world. With such a focus we might more readily come to internalize the *mitzvot* and *halacha* (הלכה—rabbinic path) as the lens through which we view the world<sup>83</sup> and to honor them in practice.<sup>84</sup>

We tried to imagine what it would mean to be integrated to do God’s will with every part of our lives, to use not only our bodies, rationality, and emotions, but also the memories, feelings, and drives deep in our limbic brains and brainstems, which can have powerful effects but which ordinarily escape our consciousness and control.

To purposefully awaken our *neschama tahora* (נשמה טהורה—pure soul), we imagined concentrating our awareness on the *Gaon* (גאון—the Majesty or Mastermind), with every inhalation and exhalation of breath reaffirming that God is masterminding *Hakol* (הכול—the all) of *ha-Beriah*, so that we might do as the Torah commands us: וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לֵבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ (“And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your means”).<sup>85</sup>

### Stumbling Blocks

Yet we could also see that one might achieve integration and not have knowledge of Torah; and in that case, might just as easily do evil as good. For having the *capacity* to do good is not the same as knowing what is good. In order to ensure that we serve to raise up humanity, the most important integration for us as Jews is that of our free will with the path of Torah.

Torah tells us, “Do not place a stumbling block before the blind” (וְלֹפְתִי עֹר לֹא תֵתֵן מִכְשֹׁל).<sup>86</sup> While this usually refers to *placing* a stumbling block before others, it may also apply to *removing* stumbling blocks,<sup>87</sup> including from within ourselves.

Many of our internal stumbling blocks spring from conscious attitudes and emotions, which are relatively

accessible to be reformed. But others rise up from our unconscious, triggered by long-past painful experiences, such as those that are potentiated by insecure attachment<sup>88</sup> in infancy and trauma in childhood.<sup>89</sup> Not remediated, these stumbling blocks can lead to a failure of character development.<sup>90</sup>

Once aware of our stumbling blocks and more conscious of our immoral behavior, we could better see how to redirect that behavior. We could further accept the necessity for *teshuvah* (תשובה—repentance), turning or returning to the way of God and Torah, by studying Torah and adhering to the *mitzvot*.

### Teshuvah Precedes Tikkun Olam

Rav Yaakov Medan (b. 1950) teaches that, “... true ‘*tikkun*’ (repair)” is based on our own *teshuvah*.<sup>91</sup> And the teaching of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (1937-2020) adds that we can attain a godly way of life, individually and collectively, covering over past misbehavior and fulfilling our moral-spiritual potential, because “All forms of *teshuvah*, however diverse and complex, have a common core: that human beings have it in their power to effect inward change.”<sup>92</sup>

They also have a common source. As Rabbi Hirsch teaches,<sup>93</sup> the possibility of repentance is inherent in the four-lettered name of God:

Had there been no Man created in this world, no creature gifted with freedom of will and so having the possibility to deviate from ... [the] right path, there would be no necessity for the *מדת הרחמים* [*midat harakhamim*—the qualities of God’s mercy] for the development of the world.... [But with humankind] ... endowed with freedom of will, and hence the ability to go astray, and who had first to be educated to . . . [its] true high calling, the *מדת הרחמים* entered. The rule of God in compassionate love, which allows [hu]mankind to continue in spite of its errors, which leads it over its deviations, to the truth, over its aberrations back to faithful attention to duty, is always ready to grant fresh life and a new future.

In addition, Rav Alex Israel (DOB unk.) teaches that *teshuva* may provide

... the moral-spiritual foundation not only of our individual lives but of our redemption as a people.<sup>94</sup> *Teshuva* can be perceived as a national process of renaissance, restoration and redemption.<sup>95</sup>

An integral part of that redemption, “... the Jewish idea of [atonement] comprises not only the spiritual and moral rebirth of ourselves, but along with it a fresh arrangement of our external, our social and national conditions.”

But in order for that process to happen, it *must be rooted in the moral-spiritual infrastructure* of society. When that infrastructure is strong and stable, its moral guidelines for our behavior (into which we have been

socialized from childhood) sustain our physical well-being, psychological and emotional equilibrium, and moral-spirituality. Those outcomes, in turn, prompt and sustain our political, economic, and social initiatives to transform the larger world in the image of God.

### ***Repairing Our Families and Communities***

The moral-spiritual infrastructural foundation of society has been in the past and continues to be the family.

If one wishes the spirit of ethical integrity to permeate this society, then there is only one way: ‘build houses’ (Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 29:5), for such a spirit can flourish only in the dedicated atmosphere of a home. *There exists no substitute for the home*, and if one is looking elsewhere for the source of peace and prosperity, he is searching in vain. All of a nation’s politics and diplomacy, its theories of national economy and institutions for mass education, its trade and industry, its schools and community centers—none of these will save the people from extinction if they let the parental home become a parody. Are children born for the sake of the state’s false concern instead of the warm love of parents? Does the census show ever-growing numbers of children without parents and parents without children? Does the nation’s high society make a mockery of morality and modesty? If so, then all the palaces it is building are founded on quicksand.<sup>96</sup>

We came to understand “It is only a morally pure family life that becomes the cradle of a free nation, which stands for Right and the duties of brotherly love of fellow man....”<sup>97</sup> We came to believe that the commitment of any society to eliminate poverty, oppression, and injustice presupposes that it is rooted in a people “... conceived, born, brought up, and living” under moral law.<sup>98</sup> Contrary to contemporary thinking, the state is not the source of family well-being; the family is the source of the moral well-being of the state.

The trouble is that parents, who themselves were not conceived, born, and brought up under moral law, almost certainly are not equipped to teach it to their children. Moreover, the family home may have no viable replacement for itself when it comes to teaching personal and civic morality,<sup>99</sup> so that in effect children receive no moral teaching if families fail to fulfill that responsibility.

When that happens, and the attitudes and behavior of children become problematic, parents often come to rely on schools, clergy, social workers, counselors and therapists to fill the gap. But those professionals typically have other mandates to fulfill. Asking them to take on the job of parents is not only unworkable but unfair. A not uncommon result is that many of those professionals experience burnout and abandon their careers of service.

And where burnout is widespread and the availability of help is scarce, families often become caught up in a Kafkaesque maze of police, courts, and other criminal justice institutions, whose professionals are also vulnerable to overload and burnout. Worse yet, when these professionals become swamped, they often morph into forces of corruption and injustice.

### ***Moral Ennui and its Antidote***

Indifference to morality has made families a convenient target for manipulation and exploitation by powerful economic forces and their political enablers. Commercialized voices are cheering on the sabotage of moral family life, ensuring our nation’s fixation on materialism and sensuality—so we find ourselves in a world in which “... everywhere depravity of morals and social tyranny and oppression go hand in hand.”<sup>100</sup>

The commercially promoted repudiation of religiously based morality in the United States<sup>101</sup> has had the effect of distracting families from the task of building and sustaining faith-based communities. The danger is that those communities, now in historic decline, will continue to withdraw from the mission of *tikkun olam*, and leave unfulfilled the vision of our patriarch Jacob:

This stone [set up by Jacob at Beth-El] shall be built up to a house in which such a life shall be lived that God will enter therein. Thereby, and thereby only ... can a place on earth become a house of God.... The sanctity of the home is the necessary condition for the sanctity of the House of God, which is not called מִקְדָּשׁ [*mikdash*—sanctuary] because it is the place to which קְדוּשָׁה [*kedusha*—moral holiness] is relegated, but because from there holiness is to flow out and penetrate all human conditions and places, to be their centre point. וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ, ‘let them make a Sanctuary unto Me’ (Exodus 25:8), it says later on to the descendants of Jacob who are to build out the foundation of this stone into a system of private and national life.<sup>102</sup>

For ideally, what begins with our personal rectification through *teshuvah*, extends to our marriages, families, and faith communities, to vitalize the moral-spiritual infrastructure of the broader community and society.<sup>103</sup>

... the family of Abraham were to be the realization of the establishment of human society on the basis of freedom and equality, where the value and nobility of every human being is recognised; where the common mission לשמר דרך הי לעשת צדקה ומשפט [to guard the way of God to do righteousness and justice] as the expressed Will of God is alone to have the dictating rule over everybody.<sup>104</sup>

At such times when the moral-spiritual infrastructure is threatened, the prophet Isaiah (57:14) calls out to us from the far distant past: הָרִימוּ מַכְשׁוֹל



מִדֶּרֶךְ עָמִי (“Take up the stumbling block from the way of my people”).

Biblical scholar Nehama Leibowitz (1905-1997) spells out the obligation to do that:

... the Torah teaches us that even by sitting at home doing nothing, by complete passivity and divorcement from society, one cannot shake off responsibility for what is transpiring in the world at large, for the iniquity, violence and evil there. By not protesting, ‘not marking the graves’ and danger spots, you have become responsible for any harm arising therefrom, and have violated the prohibition against placing a stumbling block.<sup>105</sup>

And, as Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) comments on the verse concerning the impending destruction of the city of Sodom:

“And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous inside the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sakes,”<sup>106</sup> that the words “inside the city” connote that the piety and awe of God of the righteous [in their protest against evil] had to be expressed openly, publicly, if the city was to be saved for their sake.

Nehama Leibowitz remarks further on this moral duty:

The same city which forces the righteous few into retirement so that their scrupulous moral standards should not interfere with the injustice dominating public life, that same city is not entitled to claim salvation by virtue of the handful of righteous men [and women] leading a secluded life within it.<sup>107</sup>

The antidote at such times is the renewed actualization of the Torah,<sup>108</sup> a visionary strategy we empower with every *mitzvah* we fulfill. For when the *mitzvah*-based culture becomes dominant, selfishness is deterred by the honored obligations of *tzedaka* (תְּצַדִּיק—righteousness) and *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט—justice); and cruelty is discouraged by the pervasiveness of *khesed* (חֶסֶד—kindness). Our combined *mitzvot*, when carried out persistently and wholeheartedly, can transform poverty, oppression, and injustice into prosperity, freedom, equality and equity.

We make God present by acting in a godly way, like when we study and observe the Law.<sup>109</sup> When we pray, we don’t experience God as listening to the prayer service but as present within it.<sup>110</sup> Even our speech brings God near, since “The mention of God’s name in our mouths constitutes the manifestation of the *Shekhina* in the world.”<sup>111</sup> As Hillel opined in the voice of the Divine: אִם אֲנִי בָּאֵן הַכֹּל בָּאֵן, וְאִם אֲנִי לֹא בָּאֵן מִי בָּאֵן (“If I [God] am here, all [my servants] are here; but if I am not here [in their hearts], who is here?”).<sup>112</sup>

For we are not to be the makers of the moral law but to be made by it:

The origin, character, purpose and significance of the Jewish laws differs from all others.

Everywhere else the law is created and formulated by the people; the Jewish people were formed by the Law. Everywhere else the law serves the people, the Jewish people serve the Law.<sup>113</sup>

Unless we uphold the laws of the Creator, our efforts to bring about righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and kindness will be in vain.

As Jews and Torah-inspired community organizers, we came to realize that to achieve *tikkun olam*, nothing less than the Noachide laws<sup>114</sup> or their equivalent must serve as the minimum moral-spiritual infrastructure to guide the social life of humankind; and that for us as Jews, the *mitzvot* and *halakha* should be understood as that minimum.

### Obstacles to Tikun Olam

Obstacles are inevitable in the work of *tikkun olam*. The nature of the work is almost always controversial; and even when it’s not, the day-to-day challenges of it often put us at odds with ourselves.

For example, we longed to achieve physical well-being, mental clarity, emotional balance, and moral conviction. But we often felt pressured to act in ways that seemed contradictory to those goals. Much of our understanding of this vexation came from the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik.<sup>115</sup>

We were attracted to associations inspired by moral-spiritual belief, such as our families, faith communities, support groups, and civic associations; but we also felt pressured to commit ourselves to institutions driven by material creativity, such as universities, governments, and corporations—and often they were at odds.

We wanted to be valued for our practical achievements, yet we also longed for moral-spiritual redemption. We wanted to live out our essential goodness, but we sometimes believed that goal to be impractical. We wanted to assert control but, on the other hand, we wanted compassionate acceptance, solitude, and inner tranquility. Sometimes we were preoccupied with the struggle to influence others and sometimes we were completely taken up with the challenges of self-control. And finally, we were often confused by our contradictory experiences of having power in some situations and no power in others; and with the latter, we often had a sense of being incomplete, even feeble.

When that happened, we sought the comfort of psychic harmony but often didn’t find it, since none of our victories or defeats were ever complete or permanent. So we learned to live with cognitive dissonance.

### Experience of Faith

It was our faith, that allowed us to do that. We felt secure relying on (בִּטְחוֹן—*bitachon*) God’s ability to respond. We trusted that when we followed the Torah’s teachings, the God of Providence would provide for our needs. Trusting in that way didn’t wipe out the pain of

the failures, but it did help us to treat them as temporary setbacks.

For we knew that the *Gaon Hakol* (גאון הכל—Mastermind of All), creates the potential for unlimited goodness in the world. We accepted that *God may act in ways that are entirely outside of our reason and experience*; and by that recognition, that *we too were able to act in ways that were entirely outside of our reason and experience*.

Then, too, we were unified—within ourselves and with others in our work—because we knew that for us, there was only one way to go, namely the Torah’s path of righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and kindness. As we have been guided by the prophet Isaiah (30:21): וְאָזְנֶיךָ תִּשְׁמָעֶנָּה דְּבַר מַאֲחֲרִיךְ לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדֶּרֶךְ לָכֹ: (“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying: This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right and when you turn to the left”).

We acknowledged the essential role of prayer in helping us to align our will and actions with the Torah—prayer not to change God’s behavior but our own, through self-judgment, *hitpaleil* (הִתְפַּלֵּל),<sup>116</sup> prayer which asks: “Let me fulfill my mission ... for which You have created me ... the one formula for a prayer which can always hope to be granted.”<sup>117</sup>

We also knew, however, that whenever and wherever we abandoned that mission, we would hasten the end of what makes us uniquely human (הֶאֱנוּשִׁוֹת קֶץ). As Rabbi Hirsch teaches:

By yielding and giving ourselves up to the enticement and pleasures of life which God has given us to be used only to further God-serving purposes of the world, we have stripped our physical beings of its [sic] moral character, the character of טהרה [moral purity], of being in full control of ourselves; we have sunk our moral freedom of will in the bonds of physical sensuality and thereby sunk to the level of animals and given up the basis of a continued existence worthy of human beings.<sup>118</sup>

In such an animal world, there is no righteousness; and where there is no righteousness, there can be no truth; where there is no truth, no justice; where there is no justice, no freedom; where there is no freedom, no peace; and where there is no peace, no kindness. We have witnessed this effect in the life of virtually every authoritarian regime on earth and even here in the United States in recent years.

Were we created, we asked ourselves, simply for the mindless and soulless pursuit of physique, possessions, position, privilege, and power, which invariably reward us with spiritual alienation and psychic depression?<sup>119</sup>

In the end we choose either commitment to our own boundless sensory and material pleasure, comfort

and convenience, or to something greater than ourselves but on which our lifelong well-being depends.

We may choose to live our lives, as Rabbi Hirsch suggests, so that from our example, our contemporaries may “... derive courage and enthusiasm . . .,” so that from us they will get the “... strength to build up that which seemed never to have been built up and never to be built up, and ... [our] activities will lay the foundation on which even the very last generation will build on and on.”<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, we may serve that godly purpose wherever we may be, whether in a corporate organization or a covenantal community, in a civic-action organization or on a construction site, a university classroom or a neighborhood watch meeting, a retail store or an auto repair shop, a pick-up basketball game or our own family. Regardless of the world we inhabit, our *kavanah* (כַּוְנָה—intention) and *maaseh* (מַעֲשֵׂה—action) can lift up our own lives, the lives of others with whom we’re interconnected, and the planet on which we all live.

And lifting up our lives is especially what’s needed by those of us who hope to perfect the world. For the work of *tikkun olam* can be challenging and painful. It can lead to *kilyon einayim* (כִּלְיוֹן עֵינַיִם—a longing of the eyes) for it is rarely to be fulfilled in one’s lifetime.<sup>121</sup> And it’s hard for those of us who do it to admit that, at best, our individual legacy is minuscule when stacked up against what needs to be done to repair the world. Still, it’s our choice as to whether or not we will do the *mitzvot* to further repair the world. It’s always our choice.

In making that choice, we should ask ourselves if we would be willing to die for it. We don’t say this for dramatic effect. We are all of us dying, coming closer to death with every breath we take. So we ought to be asking ourselves what we want to do with the rest of our lives, how we will use whatever time is left to us. It’s really a question of what we’re willing to *live for*. Because if we have nothing for which we are willing to die, for which we choose purposefully to devote the days and decades of our lives, then for what are we living?<sup>122</sup>

We leave you to grapple with that question through the following visualization. Sit back. Close your eyes and imagine you’re the solo driver of a long-haul truck and semi-trailer, making deliveries around the country. You’re getting ready to go on the road. Although your rig is fully loaded, it’s carrying a strange load. There are only six large containers. You discover that the boxes are oddly labeled in large letters: *Righteousness, Truth, Justice, Freedom, Peace, and Kindness*. You find notes regarding the recipients attached to the invoices. It all gives you pause, but you decide to accept this curiosity. After all, you’re only the driver. You check your delivery route, note that you have six stops to make, and hit the road.

Your first delivery is to a clergyman. When you arrive, you tell him that you have a delivery of *Right-*

*eousness* for him. Oddly, he tells you he's not going to accept delivery. You look at the invoice. He is a senior clergyman who has been covering up the pedophilia and other sexual predations of his junior colleagues, betraying those children, their families, and their faith.

At that moment, something very strange happens. You hear a voice in your head, a godly voice that asks: "What do you think about this, and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "What can I do? I'm just the delivery person. Pedophilia is a crime. Let the police take care of it."

Your second delivery is to the president of your own congregation, in which a small clique of religiously indifferent board members has been heavily promoting secular programs and cutting resources for religious education and social action. When you arrive, you tell him that you have a delivery of *Truth* for him ... but again, you hear that he's not going to accept delivery.

Then, you hear that voice again in your head, asking: "What do you think about this, and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "What can I do? I'm just one person. It's up to the board to take care of this."

Your third delivery is to a probation supervisor in your town, whom you happen to know personally. He has failed to train his officers to treat domestic violence as a violation of probation. When you arrive, you tell him that you have a delivery of *Justice* for him ... but he tells you he's not going to accept delivery.

You again hear the godly voice, asking: "What do you think about this, and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "I'm not sure what I'm willing to do about this—it raises a lot of questions about loyalty to my friends."

Your fourth delivery is to a meeting of your state legislature, which has been working non-stop to suppress voting by minorities, the poor, college students, and ex-convicts. When you arrive, you tell them that you have a delivery of *Freedom* for them ... but they tell you they're not going to accept delivery.

Again, the voice comes: "What do you think about this, and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "I'm not qualified to fix this. What do I know about lobbying the legislature?"

Your fifth delivery is to a meeting of neighborhood watch members who have been stopping and questioning anyone of color they see in their neighborhood after dark, reporting them to the police as suspicious, which often leads to their arrest and stokes racial tensions in the city. When you arrive, you tell them that you have a delivery of *Peace* for them ... but they tell you they're not going to accept delivery.

Then comes the voice again: "What do you think about this, and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "What do I know about fixing racism?"

Lastly, you have a delivery of *kindness* to random strangers you encounter on the streets of your city. You try to get their attention, but you can't seem to distract them from their smart-phones and tablets and get them to see what's happening all around them.

Undimmed, the godly voice asks: "What do you think about this and what, if anything, are you going to do about it?" Perhaps you respond: "What can I do about it? Everybody's doing it."

After a few moments of silence, the godly voice in your head returns one last time saying: "What are you doing down there with the gift of life I have given to you?"

The disturbing, even destructive impact of the personal and social challenges we face was articulated by Rabbi Bill Lebeau, former Vice Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary:

'I'm well aware of our dying as a community. We're awaiting not one giant to lead us, but a chorus of courageous leaders who will help us transform the shudder of a dying people' into something new.<sup>123</sup>

We leave you to contemplate that image with the words of our "anthem" as Torah-inspired community organizers,<sup>124</sup> which we have sung with thousands of members of faith-based organizing projects.

## New World Coming

*There's a new world coming, we're going to shape it.  
There's a new world coming, we're going to make it.  
We're going to sing, we're going to dance.  
We're going to give humanity a chance.*

*Organize, organize. . .  
With the word of God leading every life. (x2)*

*We've got a vision of salvation on this earth.  
It's a time for humankind to live in peace.  
To come to know that we can make  
What our hearts want the whole world to be.*

*Organize, organize. . .  
With the word of God leading every life. (x2)*

*It's a job that's going to take all our lifetimes,  
And a whole lot more besides.  
So let's start laying track and get on a train  
To a righteous world for us and our offspring.*

*Organize, organize. . .  
With the word of God leading every life. (x2)*

*There's a new world coming, we're going to shape it.  
There's a new world coming, we're going to make it.  
We're going to sing, we're going to dance.  
We're going to give humanity a chance.*

Finally, if your spiritual resources as a Torah-inspired community organizer need replenishment from time to time, as ours have, we share below our own *tefillot* (תפילות—prayers) and a *chazanut* (חזנות—cantorial music) recording available [here](#) for *davnen* (דאוונען [Yid.]—praying):

## Lovingly hold Adonai your God

*Lovingly hold Adonai your God  
With all your tears and joy,  
With all your godliness unshakable,  
Lovingly hold Adonai.*

*This path you are guided on  
Shall fill your heart,  
Walk it for the children.*

*Live it always,  
At home at work at play,  
Going back and forth  
In the light and dark.*

*Mark your hand with its map,  
Put it before your eyes,  
On your door and over the world,  
Say you're one with Adonai.*

*Lovingly hold Adonai your God  
With all your tears and joy,  
With all your godliness unshakable,  
Lovingly hold Adonai.*

<sup>1</sup> We view *tikkun olam* as a condition of the covenant between the Jewish people and God. See Rabbi Irving Yitzchak Greenberg (b. 1933), “What Happened at Sinai,” J.J. Greenberg Institute for the Advancement of Jewish Life (2021) [[https://mechon-hadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh\\_torah\\_source\\_sheets/GreenbergParashatYitro5781.pdf](https://mechon-hadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergParashatYitro5781.pdf)]: “At this place [Sinai], the Israelites as a people entered into the covenant of *tikkun olam*, to repair the world and fill it with life.”

<sup>2</sup> See Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 20:37, וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִסְכַּת הַבְּרִית (“And I will bring you into the bond of the covenant”). The word “bond” (מִסְכַּת) is based on the root מ-ס-ר, meaning to transfer, as in “handing over,” but also is commonly understood to mean “tradition,” that which is passed from generation to generation.

<sup>3</sup> See Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch commentary on Bereishit (Genesis) 5:8. The simple definition we have relied on of course doesn't do justice to the Kabbalistic view of *tikkun*.

<sup>4</sup> The Kabbalists in sixteenth and seventeenth century Safed spoke of the “completion of the world” (תיקון עולם—*tikkun olam* or simply *tikkun*) as the gathering of all the sparks of holiness strewn among the imperfections of life. *Tikkun olam* now commonly refers to “repair of the world.” The etymology of *tikkun* points to multiple meanings: to *be in order* (הִתְקַנַּת) (Daniel 4:33); a twisted thing which cannot be *made straight* (לְתִקּוֹן) (Kohelet [Ecclesiastes] 1:15); the *arranging* (תְּקַן) of things, which may be taught by the wise [“skilled in moral philosophy”] (Kohelet 12:9); and the work of God “Who can *make straight* (לְתִקּוֹן) what He has made crooked” (Kohelet 7:13)—about which Rashi said: “See God's work: how straight it is, everything according to man's deed.”

<sup>5</sup> See Sanhedrin 4:5, in which “a Jewish life” is often translated as a “single soul,” although the Hebrew actually reads: וְכָל הַמְּקִימִים נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַתּוֹב כְּאִלוּ קִים עוֹלָם מְלֵא (“and the Torah considers anyone who saves a single Jewish life (מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל) as though he saved an entire world”). Notably, however, the vast majority of Jews appear to make no distinction between saving Jewish and non-Jewish lives when the occasions arise to do so, and nothing forbids us from treating all others as the children of God.

<sup>6</sup> For examples, see Bereishit 9:12, 9:16, 13:15, 17:7, etc.

<sup>7</sup> See Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 21:33; and see also: Rabbi Matityahu Clark, *Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem & New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1999), p. 186; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), p. 466; and Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Ramat-Gan-Jerusalem: Massada Publishing, 1981), p. 1907.

<sup>8</sup> See Bereishit 21:33, translated by Hirsch as “God of the future.”

<sup>9</sup> Hirsch, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See Hirsch commentary on Shemot (Exodus) 34:7: נֶצַח חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים (“Preserving love for the thousandth generation”).

<sup>11</sup> See Rav Michael Hattin, “Parashat Miketz: From Dreamer to Interpreter,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (n.d.) [<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/dreamer-interpreter>].

<sup>12</sup> Regarding God’s purpose in creating *ha-Beriah*, see Rav Ezra Bick, “The Purpose and Signs of Miracles According to the Ramban,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (n.d.) [<https://www.torahmusings.com/2015/04/the-purpose-of-signs-and-miracles-according-to-the-ramban/>].

<sup>13</sup> In the Yom Kippur Shaharit (morning) service, we acknowledge עֵינֶיךָ מִנֶּגֶד וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִמֶּךָ וְאֵין דָּבָר נֶעְלָם מִמֶּךָ (“There is no thing concealed from You and nothing is concealed from before Your eyes”). In effect, there is nothing, no action, too small for which Hashem arranges consequences—not unlike Newton’s Third Law of Motion, which we assume the Creator also authored.

<sup>14</sup> As the wisdom of Solomon (Kohelet 11:9) cautions us: וְהָלַךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְךָ וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ וְדַע כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֵלֶּה יְבִיאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים: בְּמִשְׁפָּט (“And walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, but know that in all these things God will bring you into judgement”).

<sup>15</sup> See Rav Ezra Bick, “The Symbolism of Chametz,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (1997) [<http://www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/pes61-eb.htm>], in which he affirms that there is no Pesach without Shavuot—there is no freedom without the law; but also, that there is no Shavuot without Pesach—there can be no commitment to the law without moral freedom.

<sup>16</sup> Hirsch comment on Bereishit 1:1

<sup>17</sup> Hirsch, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 5:12—“When God placed the Earth under Man’s sway, it was to be elevated in the service of moral human purposes by the use of its powers.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> “Incorporeal” is how we describe that which is unknowable in the ways we know the material world. Moreover, as the *masorah* directs, our task and our welfare require us to know God’s will for us from the Torah, and to carry it out, not to fathom the particulars of how God created and masterminds *ha-Beriah*.

<sup>21</sup> In other words, God is nothing like us; as we read in Bamidbar (Numbers) 23:19, לֹא אִישׁ אֵל (“God is not a man”).

<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Our belief in an omniscient and omnipotent God does not depend on material proof, because God’s incorporeality makes that impossible. We find useful in this regard the sociology of Peter L. Berger in *The Sacred Canopy, Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969—Kindle edition, Open Road Media, 2011), which describes the phenomenology of “plausibility structures” (loc. 729), which are constructed and maintained by social interaction and shared language experience. Berger describes the interplay between the non-material plausibility structures, which convey the meaning of the material world as we project it, and how we actually experience the world. When the plausibility structures accurately foretell outcomes in the material world, they become stronger; when they no longer conform to such outcomes, they begin to weaken. The *masorah*, as a plausibility structure, was weakened because the world of the enclosed traditional Jewish community and the socialization of its members were overtaken by the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment, from the late 1700s to the late 1800s) and by the allure of unrestrained sensuality and materialism that followed the beginnings of secularization in Europe in the seventeenth century. That history did not disprove the value of the *masorah*’s principles and practices to Jewish communities, but it did undermine their transmission from generation to generation by observant families. Nevertheless, the plausibility structure of the *masorah* has survived for thousands of years because, for the remnant that has adhered to it, their physical and spiritual integrity, individually and as a people, has been sustained.

<sup>24</sup> In this regard, see the insightful commentary of Samson Rafael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, Volume I (Feldheim Publishers, 1984, 1997), p. 26: “... the members of the ‘House of Israel’ are increasingly losing confidence in themselves, in their Calling, in their God and His Law, and His promises.... They increasingly declare that the Divine Law of Sinai, which should have been their soul, is dead.... Because of this they were becoming corpses, dead to their God and to their people, dead to the great hope—the perfection of [hu]mankind, which is the sublime historical calling of the House of Israel.”

<sup>25</sup> Hirsch, *ibid.*



<sup>26</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereshit 2:2

<sup>27</sup> See Paul Davies, “Taking Science on Faith,” *New York Times* (November 24, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Feynman, a physicist and Nobel laureate, notes that “... nobody really understands quantum mechanics.” According to Sean Carroll, a theoretical physicist at the California Institute of Technology, “Physicists brought up in the modern system will look into your eyes and explain with all sincerity that they’re not really interested in understanding how nature really works; they just want to successfully predict the outcomes of experiments,” and in that sense they are not “empirically minded.... although how reality works might actually matter.” See Carroll, “Even Physicists Don’t Understand Quantum Mechanics,” *New York Times* (September 7, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> As described in Richard Bernstein’s article, “BOOKS OF THE TIMES; Getting Down to Earth With the Astronomical,” *New York Times* (April 5, 2000), a review of the book by Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> See Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers, The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1999—Kindle edition), pp. 165-69.

<sup>31</sup> See Claire Isabel Webb, “Cosmic vision,” Aeon (March 10, 2023) [<https://aeon.co/essays/jwsts-cosmic-revelations-will-change-our-interior-lives-too>], which posits that the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) will expand “both our astrophysical and moral universes”; and Jonathan O’Callaghan, “JWST’s First Glimpses of Early Galaxies Could Break Cosmology,” *Scientific American* (September 14, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Made on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert (March 7, 2024)

<sup>33</sup> The idea of creation out of nothing is not a bar to rational and plausible understanding when we acknowledge, as science has done recently, that the explanation of the origin of the Creation does not lie within the physical Creation itself; ipso facto, it was created by some kind of incorporeal intelligence, not subject to the empirical methods of science, which sounds a lot like “God.” Of course, the affirmation that God created the universe out of nothing presents a problem for the doubter who sincerely wants to understand the Torah but can’t get over this mind-bending hurdle. Why should one accept that God created the universe out of nothing? We may begin to see the possibility with the recognition that “nothing” refers to nothing of this material world, the world inhabited by humankind, that we can experience and understand. We also accept an incorporeal Creator and Mastermind of Creation, one whose existence is not of our material world but nonetheless has the power to create and mastermind our world, because the opposing point of view, that the universe is no more than random miscellany, without origin and without any existence beyond human comprehension, is distinctly less reasonable and plausible.

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Lawrence A. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing* (New York: Free Press, 2012). Similarly, Stephen Hawking in *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (New York: Bantam Books, 2018—Kindle edition), loc. 440, writes: “I think the universe was spontaneously created out of nothing, according to the laws of science.” However, *yesh mei-ayin* (יש מֵאֵין)—something from nothing), according to Jewish thinking, differs from the definition of “nothing” by physicist Hawking and cosmologist Krauss. Robert Barron in “Stephen Hawking: Great Scientist, Lousy Theologian,” *ShalomTidings* (July 7, 2019) [<https://shalomtidings.org/stephen-hawkins-great-scientist-lousy-theologian/>] comments that, “The first mistake ... is to equivocate on the meaning of the word ‘nothing.’ In the strict philosophical (or indeed religious) sense, ‘nothing’ designates absolute nonbeing; but what Hawking and his disciples mean by the term is in fact a fecund field of energy from which realities come and to which they return. The moment one speaks of ‘coming from’ or ‘returning to,’ one is not speaking of nothing!... Whatever you want to say about the laws of science, they are not nothing! Indeed, when the quantum theorists talk about particles spontaneously popping into being, they regularly invoke quantum constants and dynamics according to which such emergences occur.”

<sup>35</sup> See Jim Holt, “Why does the universe exist?” TED Talk (September 2, 2014) [[https://www.ted.com/talks/jim\\_holt\\_why\\_does\\_the\\_universe\\_exist?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jim_holt_why_does_the_universe_exist?language=en)].

<sup>36</sup> See Lawrence I. Bonchek, “Absence of Evidence Is Not Evidence of Absence,” *Journal of Lancaster General Hospital*, 11(3):65-66 (Fall 2016).

<sup>37</sup> For example, theoretical physicist Sabine Hossenfelder in “The Uncertain Future of Particle Physics,” *New York Times* (January 23, 2019) assesses the value of particle physics theories: “The stories about new particles, dark matter and additional dimensions, were repeated in countless media outlets from before the launch of the L.H.C [Large Hadron Collider] until a few years ago. What happened to those predictions? The simple answer is this: Those predictions were wrong—that much is clear.... In the past 30 years, particle physicists have produced thousands of theories whose mathematics they can design to ‘predict’ pretty much anything.” Hossenfelder concludes that the enterprise of physics, based on discarded theories that initially seemed to be the eternal secret of particle physics, has been generating fragmentary insights at extraordinary costs.

<sup>38</sup> See John Horgan, “Is Lawrence Krauss a Physicist, or Just a Bad Philosopher,” *Scientific American* (posted online November 20, 2015) [<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/is-lawrence-krauss-a-physicist-or-just-a-bad-philosopher/>].

<sup>39</sup> See Adam Frano and Marcelo Gleiser, “A Crisis at the Edge of Physics,” *New York Times* (June 5, 2015). Adam Frank, a professor of astrophysics at the University of Rochester, and Marcelo Gleiser, a professor of physics and astronomy at Dartmouth College, co-founded National Public Radio’s *Cosmos* and *Culture* blog.

<sup>40</sup> Horgan, op. cit.





<sup>52</sup> See Moshe ben Asher, “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing,” *Social Policy*, 50(4):55-64 (Winter 2020) [[https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI\\_CO.pdf](https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI_CO.pdf)].

<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Irving Yitzchak Greenberg, “On the Priesthood, Holiness is Living in the Fullness of Life,” J.J. Greenberg Institute for the Advancement of Jewish Life (5781/2021) [<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/priesthood>], teaches that the Creation “. . . was not made to be void; it was created to be filled with life (Isaiah 42:18). Humans are called to fill Creation with life and to repair the world so it will support life to the maximum, in all its dignity and value.” See also, Rabbi Irving Yitzchak Greenberg, “From God, With Love,” J.J. Greenberg Institute for the Advancement of Jewish Life (5781/2021) [[https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh\\_torah\\_source\\_sheets/GreenbergParashatNaso5781.pdf?utm\\_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsmi=128228057&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9Rlj4cCLuaFcMlyrqYRDwnvMVLb3PgLhjSHluGWA1w5ZwTUNF8tGllw-Zo05jzGa44BHLuB64k\\_fMW3GPlmnBz-YblZAO&utm\\_content=128228057&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergParashatNaso5781.pdf?utm_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=128228057&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9Rlj4cCLuaFcMlyrqYRDwnvMVLb3PgLhjSHluGWA1w5ZwTUNF8tGllw-Zo05jzGa44BHLuB64k_fMW3GPlmnBz-YblZAO&utm_content=128228057&utm_source=hs_email)]. Rabbi Ezra Bick, *In His Mercy: Understanding the Thirteen Midot* (Jerusalem: Magid Books, Koren Publishers, 2011—Kindle Edition), loc. 501, teaches that “The attribute of *Havaya* [הוּיָהּ—lit. being or existence; but here the Tetragrammaton, the Divine Name of the four Hebrew letters (יהוה) denoting God’s incorporeality] . . . grants life to all living things,” which we assume is not limited to physical life, but includes psychic, emotional, and moral-spiritual life, which are essential to the successful continuation of the physical life of humankind.

<sup>54</sup> David W. Weiss writes of “A Mystique of Action” in *The Wings of the Dove* (Washington, DC: B’nai B’rith Books, 1987), pp. 20-23: “Judaism is permeated by a mystique of action. The archetypal concept for the Jew is *mitzvah*; the medium of redemption is action. . . . It is the *mitzvah* that transforms, not declarations of faith. . . . Man is obliged to reflect and reciprocate the attributes of the Divine in the thrust of doing; for the Jew the ground of action is the *imitatio dei of mitzvot*. The mystery is that in their course, man is transformed.”

<sup>55</sup> Tehillim (Psalms) 119:3 and 128:1

<sup>56</sup> Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19

<sup>57</sup> As taught in Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, Volume II, pp. 388-389: “Acknowledgement of God as the Creator of life commits every thought, feeling, sensation and emotion, every word and deed to holiness,” to aligning one’s will with the will of God as revealed in the Torah.

<sup>58</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereshit 1:9

<sup>59</sup> The popularity of pornography is inversely related to popular knowledge of its deleterious effects. For some of the most damaging outcomes, see: Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); and Christine Wilcox, *How is Online Pornography Affecting Society?* (San Diego: ReferencePoint Press, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> As one of the great activist Chasidic rabbis of the modern era, Menachem M. Schneerson (1902-1994), taught, implicitly in recognition of the costs of dithering, timidity, and cowardice, “Anything worth doing should be done now and not delayed.”

<sup>61</sup> See Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746), *Mesillas Yesharim, Way of the Upright* (New York, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2014—Digital Edition), Ch. 26, Note 30, which explains that “This refers to the wisdom of the ways in which Hashem guides the world: from how Hashem directs the universe toward its ultimate goal, to His involvement with the most minute details of each person’s life, and how all these factors interconnect.” Notably, while we believe we are individually under “. . . God’s Care, that nevertheless . . . [our] own well-being, and that of every individual is dependent on the well-being of all.” See Hirsch commentary on Bamidbar 15:21.

<sup>62</sup> In his commentary on Vayikra 18:4-5, Hirsch notes that “The value of ‘learning,’ of Torah study, is only so great: גדול תלמוד, because it מביא לידי מעשה, because it leads to practice.”

<sup>63</sup> Torah study and *mitzvot* may be understood as mutually reinforcing, since anyone involved in [*mitzvot*] efforts for the welfare of the community is like one involved in Torah study [וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה בְּצִדְקָתוֹ רַבִּים כְּעוֹשֶׂה בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה] (Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ahavah, Tefillah & Birkat Kohanim, Ch. 6; Commentary: This comparison of community work to the study of Torah is found in the Yerushalmi [Jerusalem Talmud], Berachot 5:1).

<sup>64</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 6:9

<sup>65</sup> See “Tikkun Hanefesh as Tikkun Olam,” Blue Dove Foundation (2023) [<https://thebluedovefoundation.org/resource/tikkun-hanefesh-as-tikkun-olam>].

<sup>66</sup> See *Majesty and Humility*, p. 219. In *Halakhic Man*, p. 109, he declares that “The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself.”

<sup>67</sup> Mindfulness can be further strengthened with “mindsight,” which Siegel describes as the integration of relationships, mind, and the embodied brain, a vision which is “. . . holistic in the true sense of the word, inclusive of our whole being.” See Daniel J. Siegel, “Mindful Awareness, Mindsight, and Neural Integration,” *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 37(2):137-158 (2009).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> For a more detailed explanation, see Daniel J. Siegel, “Toward an interpersonal neurobiology of the developing mind: Attachment relationships, ‘mindsight’, and neural integration,” *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 22(1-2):67-94 (January-April 2001).

<sup>70</sup> See Daniel J. Siegel, “Mindfulness training and neural integration: differentiation of distinct streams of awareness and cultivation of well-being,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2(4):259-263 (December 2007).

<sup>71</sup> See: Bret Stetka, “Changing Our DNA through Mind Control,” *Scientific American* (December 16, 2014) [published online], and Eric J. Nestler, “Hidden Switches in the Mind,” *Scientific American*, 305(6):76-83 (December 2011); and see also: Daniel Siegel and Ruth Buczynski, “Rethinking Trauma, Transcript of Part 1: How to Use Brain Science to Help Patients Accelerate Healing After Trauma,” National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine [<https://www.nicabm.com/treating-trauma2017/confirmed/?l=4>]; and Dan Siegel, “Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence,” The Gottman Relationship Blog, The Gottman Institute (August 21, 2018) [<https://www.gottman.com/blog/aware-the-science-and-practice-of-presence/>].

<sup>72</sup> Siegel posits that the “mind,” the inner source of subjective experience, comes not only from the brain, encased in the skull, but from the “embodied brain,” which encompasses the entire nervous system, and from relationships. The mind incorporates all our ways of knowing, not only conscious thought or awareness. See Daniel J. Siegel, “The Neurobiology of Relationships and Community,” YouTube presentation (published March 29, 2018) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA35tWKUdPA>]. The mind is self-organizing, creating meanings, including a sense of personhood or self, thus becoming more integrated. It can also undo meanings. Ideal self-organization of the mind is flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable; in combination, these characteristics are the benchmarks of mental health. For a general introduction to this perspective, see Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight, The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010—Kindle Edition), loc. 1328. When self-organization is not optimal, we experience the chaos and rigidity that are characteristic of virtually all mental illness (loc. 1234).

<sup>73</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereshit 1:20

<sup>74</sup> See Marci Green and Marc Scholes, eds., *Attachment and Human Survival* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>75</sup> We now know with a high degree of certainty from neurological research that infant experience of “serve and return” in socio-emotional attachment to its mother or other primary caregiver plays a critical role in neurobiologically based moral development and lifelong moral behavior patterns. Human beings have a built-in potential for moral free will. However, absence of secure attachment in infancy or failure later to treat insecure attachment, doubtlessly handicap an individual’s capacity for consistent moral behavior in adulthood. The qualitative research conducted by Shoshana Ringel, “Formative Experiences of Orthodox Jewish Women: Attachment Patterns and Spiritual Development,” *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 36:73-82 (2008), for example, identifies secure attachment as a foundation for moral-spiritual development, activated through integration of a well-developed religious belief system, initially passed on through family relationships. On the neurobiology of this process, see: Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, “From actions to empathy and morality—A neural perspective,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 77(1):76-85 (January 2011) for “... evidence suggesting that the human MNS [mirror neuron system]—by linking intention and outcome, observer and actor—forms part of the neural system for empathic concern, the capacity to understand and feel another’s emotional state. By helping to establish a ‘likeness’ between interacting agents, the human MNS may support the active desire to understand others, to feel what they are feeling and to help alleviate another’s suffering. By providing a biological substrate for such fundamental affiliative behaviors, the MNS may provide a neural scaffold for the evolution of our sophisticated sociality and the morality that governs it.” In their survey of experimental data on the “neurological origin of the moral sense,” Donatella Marazziti et al., “The neurobiology of moral sense: facts or hypotheses?” *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 12:6 (March 6, 2013) concluded: “The available findings would suggest that there might be a main integrative centre for the innate morality, in particular the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, with its multiple connections with the limbic lobe, thalamus and brainstem. The subjective moral sense would be the result of an integration of multiple automatic responses, mainly associated with social emotions and interpretation of others’ behaviours and intentions.” See also Allan N. Schore, “Foreword,” in Darcia Narvaez, ed., *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom* (W.W. Norton, 2014); Leo Pascual et al., “How does morality work in the brain? A functional and structural perspective of moral behavior,” *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*, 7 (September 2013); Dr. Mario F. Mendez, “The Neurobiology of Moral Behavior: Review and Neuropsychiatric Implications,” *CNS Spectrums*, 14(11):608-620 (November 2009); and Manuela Fumagalli and Alberto Priori, “Functional and clinical neuroanatomy of morality,” *Brain*, 135:2006-2021 (2006).

<sup>76</sup> “Dissociative disorders are mental disorders that involve experiencing a disconnection and lack of continuity between thoughts, memories, surroundings, actions and identity.” See Mayo Clinic, “Dissociative disorders” (November 17, 2017) [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dissociative-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20355215>].

<sup>77</sup> See Robert J. Waldinger et al., “Mapping the Road from Childhood Trauma to Adult Somatization,” *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 68(1):129-135 (January-February 2006).

<sup>78</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereshit 2:7

<sup>79</sup> Some of the most illuminating knowledge on this subject comes from the research, writing, teaching, and clinical practice of Dr. Daniel J. Siegel who, in addition to being a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, is a founding co-director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA, and Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute; and from Dr. Allan Schore, a member of the UCLA Medical School faculty, the UCLA Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, and the UCLA Center for Culture, Brain, and Development.

<sup>80</sup> Isaiah 58:12: וְבָנוּ מִמֶּךָ חֲרֻבוֹת עוֹלָם מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר-וָדוֹר תִּקְוָמָם וְקָרָא לְךָ גֹּדֶר פְּרָץ מְשׁוּבָב נְתִיבוֹת לְשֹׁבֵת (“And those who shall be of you shall rebuild the old ruins; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.”).

<sup>81</sup> See Rabbi Yisrael Ben Eliezer [1700-1760] (Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok, trans. & comm.), *Devekut: The Teachings of the Baal Shem Tov* (Fairfield, IA: Yeshivat Benei N’vi’im, 1993—Kindle edition), locs. 25, 75, 150 & 275.

<sup>82</sup> It’s also possible to form avoidant or other insecure attachments to God. Those instances reflect the conviction that God is not accessible or responsive to one’s needs. See Christopher G. Ellison et al., “Prayer, Attachment to God, and Symptom of Anxiety-Related Disorders among U.S. Adults,” *Sociology of Religion*, 75(2):208-233 (February 2014).

<sup>83</sup> For an in-depth treatment of this aspiration, see Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

<sup>84</sup> See *Mesillas Yesharim*, 19:47: “‘A person should spend an extra third to beautify a mitzvah’ [בְּחִדּוֹר מִצְוָה עַד שְׁלִישׁ בְּמִצְוָה] (Bava Kama 9b).... [because] the performance of the mitzvah by itself is not enough. Rather, one must also honor and beautify it” [to be worthy in the sight of God]. We understand that worthiness as effecting the *mitzvah*’s transformational power in the image of God.

<sup>85</sup> Devarim 6:5

<sup>86</sup> Vayikra 19:14

<sup>87</sup> See Nehama Leibowitz, op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> The CDC-Kaiser Permanente adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study is one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being. The original study was conducted at Kaiser from 1995 to 1997 with two series of data collection. Over 17,000 HMO members from Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors. For the original study, see Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults, The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4):245-258 (May 1998). See also: Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Health,” *Academic Pediatrics*, 9:131-32 (2009); Peter Fonagy et al., “Morality, disruptive behavior, borderline personality disorder, crime and their relationships to security of attachment,” in L. Atkinson & K.J. Zucker (eds.), *Attachment and Psychopathology* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1997), pp. 223-274; and Paula R. Pietromonaco et al., “Health and Attachment Processes,” in (Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes, eds.) *Attachment Theory and Research: New Directions and Emerging Themes* (New York & London: Guilford Press, 2015). The benefits of secure attachment from childhood are indirectly suggested by traditional Judaism. For example, see Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 43:14—“רַחֲמִים, the feeling that we are to have inherited means more than pity. The word is derived from רָחַם, by which is designated the most self-sacrificing energy of one being for the formation of another being to come into existence and be completed; רֶחֶם, the womb, is the hearth of the deepest devotion. And afterwards, too, when the new being is there, the רַחֲם begets not only sympathy with its crying, but even more intimate joy with its smiling. A smile from the baby on the lap makes up for years of worry and sleepless nights. From this רַחֲם is רַחֲמִים formed and not only suffers when the other suffers, but knows no rest until he sees him happy....”

<sup>89</sup> See Part Three: The Minds of Children, in Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score—Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015—Kindle edition), locs. 2006-3226.

<sup>90</sup> For the attachment-foundation of morality, see: Spassena Koleva et al., “The Moral Compass of Insecurity: Anxious and Avoidant Attachment Predict Moral Judgment,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(2):185-194 (March 2014); Phillip R. Shaver and Mario Mikulincer, “An Attachment Perspective on Morality: Strengthening Authentic forms of Moral Decision-Making” (unpublished, 2010) [<http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/symposium/hspsp/2010/documents/15-shaver-mikulincer.pdf>]; and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, “Attachment, Emergent Morality, and Aggression: Toward a Developmental Socioemotional Model of Antisocial Behavior,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 21(4):703-728 (2010). See also: Deborah Davis et al., “‘I can’t get no satisfaction’: insecure attachment, inhibited sexual communication, and sexual dissatisfaction,” *Journal of the International Association for Relationship Research*, 13(4):465-483 (December 2006); Donald G. Dutton and Katherine White, “Attachment insecurity and intimate partner violence,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17(5):475-481 (September-October 2012); James P. Henry and Sheila Wang, “Effects of Early Stress on Adult Affiliative Behavior,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 23(8):863-875 (November 1998); Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, “Attachment Security, Compassion, and Altruism,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(1):34-38 (February 1, 2005); and Robert T. Muller et al., “Attachment as a Mediator between Childhood Maltreatment and Adult Symptomology,” *Journal of Family Violence*, 27(3):243-255 (April 2012).

<sup>91</sup> See Rav Yaakov Medan, “The Meaning of Josef’s Estrangement,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (n.d.) [<https://www.torahmusings.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/10-65miketz.htm>].

<sup>92</sup> Adin Steinsaltz (Michael Swirsky, ed. & trans.), *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 3-4.

<sup>93</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 2:4

<sup>94</sup> See the Mishnah Torah, Sefer Mada, Teshuvah 7, which warns that “Israel will not be redeemed except through *teshuvah*” (וְאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגְאָלִין אֲלָא בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה) [[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/911908/jewish/Teshuvah-Chapter-Seven.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/911908/jewish/Teshuvah-Chapter-Seven.htm)].

<sup>95</sup> See Rav Alex Israel, “Teshuva: Two Dimensions of Return,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (n.d.) [<https://www.etzion.org/il/en/teshuva-two-dimensions-return>].

<sup>96</sup> See פסח של הגדה *The Hirsch Haggadah*, With commentary compiled and adapted from the writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1998), pp. 14-15.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Op. cit., 18:4-5

<sup>99</sup> Michael Novak on “The first institution of democracy. Tocqueville on religion: What faith adds to reason,” *European View*, 6:87-101 (2007), describes de Tocqueville’s belief in the importance of the home to democracy: “When there is no trust in the home, trust in public life is highly improbable. Where there is a lack of [moral] self-government at home, self-government in the public sphere has little probability of success” (p. 97) [<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1007/s12290-007-0012-8>]. We discern in the *masorah* that the merit (זְכוּת—*zechut*) of one’s lineage (יְחֻס—*yichus*) is the generation-to-generation blessing one receives in the form of the parental voice that articulates the Torah legacy of challenge, affirmation, and commission to do the *mitzvot*.

<sup>100</sup> Hirsch commentary on Vayikra 18:3

<sup>101</sup> The harmful effects of the widespread decline of moral sensibility are multiplied by ubiquitous commercially driven rationalizations that promote unrestrained pleasure-seeking. Some of the more blatant corporate messaging includes: “Do what feels good!” (Coke), “If it feels good, do it!” (Burger King), “Freedom of expression—it’s what it’s all about” (Botox Cosmetic), “You can never have too much fun” (Apple), and “When you have passion, you have everything” (Don Julio Tequila).

<sup>102</sup> Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 28:22

<sup>103</sup> As noted by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., if the faith community “. . . does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become little more than an irrelevant social club with a thin veneer of religiosity.” See Patrick Lacroix, “Martin Luther King’s activism points to a way forward for the left—but not how we might imagine,” *The Washington Post* (January 15, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> Hirsch, *ibid.*, 37:11-12

<sup>105</sup> Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Vayikra* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1983), p. 178.

<sup>106</sup> Commentary on Bereishit 18:26

<sup>107</sup> Leibowitz, *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> “This continuous rearticulation moves people to live covenantally and keep the Torah as a guide to living, as well as play their part in the ongoing movement toward *tikkun olam*, world repair.” See Irving Yitzchak Greenberg, “The Torah Speaks in the Language of Humanity” (audio file), Hadar Institute (5781/2021) [<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/torah-speaks-language-humanity#source-9871>].

<sup>109</sup> See Bick, *op. cit.*, loc. 1505, where he notes: “The good I perform [as a “chariot” for the Shekhina] does not simply resemble divine goodness—it is Divine Goodness itself”; and see also Hirsch commentary on Bereishit 39:2.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 263.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 257.

<sup>112</sup> Sukkah 53a

<sup>113</sup> As taught in Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, Volume II, p. 387.

<sup>114</sup> The children of Noah were given seven commandments: to establish a system of laws, not to curse God, not to practice idolatry, not to engage in sexual transgressions, not to murder, not to steal, and not to eat a limb torn from a live animal. See Sanhedrin 56a and 56b.

<sup>115</sup> See Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility, The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem and New York: Urim Publications, 2012).

<sup>116</sup> For a more detailed treatment of our prayer practice, see Magidah Khulda Bat Sarah and Rabbi Moshe ben Asher, “God’s Warden,” Gather the People (2015) [[http://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/GODS\\_WARDEN.pdf](http://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/GODS_WARDEN.pdf)].

<sup>117</sup> See Hirsch commentary on I Shemuel (Samuel) 1:10-11.

<sup>118</sup> Hirsch commentary on Vayikra 16:30

<sup>119</sup> Hirsch, in *The Collected Writings*, Volume II, pp. 379-380, teaches: “If you let yourself be dazzled and enticed by the blinding radiance of the world’s powers, what are you offered in exchange for renouncing your Jewish calling? . . . When the luster dims and the success fades, it will be due to your having lost your spiritual-moral firmness, having renounced your Jacob [i.e., Jewish]-calling which summons even the poorest into the ranks of the fighters for God. . . . Consider yourself a co-builder of the Divine Sanctuary [of God’s goodness on earth] and you will find your destiny, your virtue and your purpose. . . . Thus, you lift your entire being above transience, your entire life is spent in the ‘service of the Sanctuary’ and with each small or large contribution you inscribe yourself **לזכרון לפני ה’** ‘an eternal remembrance before God’.”

<sup>120</sup> Hirsch commentary on Isaiah 58:12

<sup>121</sup> Devarim 28:65

<sup>122</sup> The point is highlighted by John Kaag and Clancy Martin in “Looking Death in the Face,” *New York Times* (December 26, 2016): “*Dying for something* has a heroic ring to it. But really, it’s the easiest thing in the world and has little to do with fame and fortune. When you wake up and eat your toast, you are dying for something. When you drive to work, you’re dying for something. . . . As surely as time passes, we human beings are dying for something. The trick to dying for something is picking the right something, day after week after precious year.”

<sup>123</sup> See Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “Looking for leaders, rabbis explore a changing society,” *Jewish Bulletin* (June 23, 1995).

<sup>124</sup> A recording of the melody is available at [www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Media/20\\_NEW\\_WORLD\\_COMING.mp3](http://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Media/20_NEW_WORLD_COMING.mp3); and sheet music is available at [www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/NEW\\_WORLD\\_COMING.jpg](http://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/NEW_WORLD_COMING.jpg).

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